

Ernst Käsemann, *On Being a Disciple of the Crucified Nazarene*. Eerdmans, 2010. ISBN – 978-0-8028-6026-2.

The present volume consists of two volumes in actuality. Part One consists of essays on biblical themes, and Part Two is for all intents and purposes the second volume of the author's *Kirchliche Konflikte* (only one volume of which was published during his lifetime).

Part One contains thirteen essays ranging from *The Righteousness of God in Paul* to *God's Image and Sinners* to *The Gospel and the Devout* and ten others. Part Two is made up of essay, speeches, and sermons that can best be characterized as 'polemical' in the sense that in them K. polemicizes against what is wrong in Church and Church life.

The reader familiar with K.'s works will recognize his staccato style almost right off. Short, pregnant, engaging sentences which carry one along as if in a wagon on a bumpy road. His remarks and observations can't be skimmed or run past with haste, they demand a slow pace and a steady determination. That is the sort of reading that is rewarded here.

Is K. right in every instance? Obviously not, since none of us are. But is he right most of the time? Certainly, he is. There are few living or dead equipped with such a sharp eye for detail and such a willingness to be brutally honest about what he sees both in the Bible and in the Church.

One example should serve to illustrate the point- his essay titled '*Prophetic Task and National Church ("Volkskirche")*' (pp. 291ff). In it, K. discusses the meaning of the Pentecost narrative, observing right out of the gate

According to the Pentecost narrative, no congregation can be called *Christian* in which prophecy has no place. In that case, it would not contain the activity of the Holy Spirit, who, according to the New Testament message, cannot be conceived apart from prophecy' (p. 291).

Those aren't exactly the words one expects of his generation's leading New Testament scholar. Piety moves and breaths here. But he goes on

... whoever does not experience any discomfort at being a disciple, at introducing discipleship to the community's life, is an unfaithful servant (p. 291).

With those thoughts as preliminary, K. launches into his assault on spiritless and lifeless Christianity, because he is tired of it and the excuses set out defending it. Of the excuse that this or that one isn't a prophet and so can't be expected to act prophetically, K. wryly says

I have heard this excuse too often to tolerate it silent (p. 292).

And then he remarks offhandedly

... prophets afflict... (p. 292).

The remainder of this delightful essay is a summons to ***Christian action***. False prophets must be denounced and real prophets (and as far as K. is concerned, that's every real Christian) must do it- by deeds.

Let me summarize. According to both Testaments the prophet, as no other messenger of God, is tempted to lead astray to idol worship. The Gospel must be made actual. Otherwise it becomes a religious worldview or a rigid dogmatic. Only the Spirit who makes alive can actualize it (p. 304).

And that's merely a small sampling of the kind of things that K. does in this collection. It's a shame that he died too long before it appeared. I think he would be very pleased to know that his ideas were still being read, and discussed. Because they certainly should be.

In a time when biblical studies seems to have lost its way, with postmodernism and the many fad theologies of the past fading and purely secular methodologies on the horizon, K. shows us a 'better way'. A way back to the text that isn't a turning back of the never to be turned back hands of time. A way back desperately needed. Thankfully, then, K. is a trustworthy guide.